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Job agency to meet Penn Lyon workers

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— *(First in a series)*

Let's say you are a carpenter working for a modular home company, married and a father of two, living in the Selinsgrove area.

You have a mortgage, plus all the usual expenses a family might have, such as food, clothing, utilities and getting orthodontic braces for the children.

Then you find out that, because the housing market continues to struggle, your company is closing down production.

What do you do?

“Call us,” said Sue Snyder, administrator at the PA CareerLink in Selinsgrove.

The center, on Bridge Street, is designed to help those who are suddenly without a job in an already difficult economy.

It is connected to a statewide database that allows employers across Pennsylvania to search for potential employees, said Rachel Smith, assistant director of the Central Pennsylvania Workforce Development Corp.

In fact, the center is going to speak to former employees of modular home builder Penn Lyon Homes on Friday. The two-hour session will provide information on everything from how to find a new job to health insurance to consumer credit counseling, Snyder said.

About 82 of Penn Lyon's 92 employees have been furloughed.

That's not to say they might have trouble finding work, though. There are numerous companies throughout the Valley that are looking for electricians, roofers, dry wall finishers, plumbers and carpenters. The agency is hosting a job fair, from 1 to 3 p.m. Sept. 15, bringing together employers seeking just such people.

Even with companies searching for employees, the overall economic picture is not rosy.

A report from the U.S. Department of Labor released last week found unemployment nationwide had edged up slightly between July and August — from 9.5 percent to 9.6 percent.

Meanwhile, private employers created 67,000 new jobs. But the Labor Department said it takes 125,000 new jobs to show growth.

August numbers specific to the Valley have not been released yet, but the unemployment rates for July are available through the Pennsylvania Center for Workforce Information and Analysis.

The number of people in the labor force shrank by nearly 800 in the four-county area.

This is “likely because many discouraged workers, no longer actively seeking work are not counted in the unemployment calculations,” Smith said.

With an estimated 1,800 people unemployed in Snyder County alone, the number of jobs posted at CareerLink must be small, too, right?

“We have seen an increase in the number of job postings,” Snyder said, “and each might be more than one position.”

Last year, the job center had an average of about 60 job postings a month. This year, that average is closer to 100. The jobs range from blue-collar work to upper-professional level, Snyder said.

“And not everybody posts with us,” she said.

Why are there seemingly more jobs available if more people are out of work?

Snyder suspects it has to do with unemployment benefits. People have a tendency not to look hard for a new job until their benefits are about to run out, she said.

“It could be that because people are delaying their job search due to unemployment compensation extensions, employers are having to advertise a little more for available positions,” she said.

It’s a bad idea to wait, she added.

However, it’s also not that easy just to pick up and start looking for work again. There’s an emotional toll when a person is laid off.

“There’s a grieving process,” Snyder said. “They need to take some time to realize what that means. There’s a loss of routine, of security, of not seeing the friends they made at work. It’s life changing and each person processes it on their own time schedule.”

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